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PP RUEHHM  
DE RUEHHM #0510 1290912  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 090912Z MAY 07  
FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2604  
INFO RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 1886  
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 2801

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000510

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: FOUR MORE HOA HAO DISSIDENTS IMPRISONED

REF: 06 HCMC 630 AND PREVIOUS

1. (SBU) On May 4, a contact in the Hoa Hao community told us that the provincial court in the Mekong Delta province of Dong Thap sentenced four Hoa Hao dissidents to prison terms ranging from four to six years on charges of "creating public disorder," under Article 245 of the 1999 Criminal Code. The four are members of the Hoa Hao dissident group of Le Quang Liem that continues to oppose what it terms GVN control over the Hoa Hao church. The charges against the four stem from a hunger strike and protest the four organized in June 2006. Per reftel reporting on the incident, the group demanded the return of their former headquarters in HCMC and the lifting of a ban on celebration of "founder's disappearance day." The protestors also demanded an investigation into an earlier incident in which they allege police beat a group of Hoa Hao members who were attempting to attend the death anniversary ceremony of another leader of the Liem group.

2. (SBU) The four Hoa Hao members sentenced on May 3 are:

-- Nguyen Van Tho, Chief representative in Dong Thap province for Le Quang Liem. He was arrested on October 2, 2006 and sentenced to six years in prison.

-- Duong Thi Tron, chief of Women's Affairs for the Dong Thap chapter of Hoa Hao and Nguyen Van Tho's wife. Tron also was arrested on October 2, 2006. She was sentenced to four years in prison.

-- Le Van Soc, Deputy Chief representative of the Liem faction in Vinh Long province, was sentenced to six years in prison. He was arrested on November 4, 2006 for involvement in the May 2006 hunger strike and for planning another hunger strike ahead of the President's November 2006 visit to HCMC. Soc also is a member of the political dissident 8406 Bloc.

-- Nguyen, Van Thuy, Youth Affairs Chief for the Vinh Long chapter, was arrested on November 21, 2006 and sentenced to five years in prison for his role in the May 2006 hunger strike.

3. (SBU) Another Hoa Hao supporter of the Liem faction, Nguyen Thi Thanh was detained in February 2006 and remains in police custody. Thanh is Liem's adopted daughter. Thanh was charged with instigating and assisting Hoa Hao elder Nguyen Thi Thu to self-immolate in March 2001. She could face life imprisonment.

4. (SBU) Comment: At the time of the hunger strike, there were credible threats -- based on the past track record of Liem's supporters -- that the group of 16 Hoa Hao protestors would commit mass self-immolation should the police attempt to forcibly breakup the protest. After negotiations between Liem and senior police officials in HCMC, an agreement reportedly was reached in which the authorities guaranteed that none of the protestors would be punished if they were to end the protest peacefully. The authorities also promised to investigate the allegations of the beating of other Hoa Hao activists.

15. (SBU) We are not aware of any GVN investigation into the police abuse allegations and we do not know what motivated the GVN to go back on its apparent pledge not to prosecute the protest organizers. Broken promises will make it more difficult for the GVN to defuse other protests by Liem's violence-prone group in the future. End Comment.

WINNICK